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## AN OUTLINE FOR STUDYING THE SONG OF SONGS.

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1. *Its place in the canon of Scripture.*—Five *Megilloth*, or Rolls, were read after the Law in the public service of the synagogue, on five specific festival occasions, viz.:

(1) The Song of Songs, on the eighth day of the Feast of Passover; which was interpreted allegorically with reference to the history of the exodus.

(2) Ruth, on the second day of the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost.

(3) Lamentations, on the ninth day of the month Ab—the traditional date of the destruction of both first and second temples.

(4) Ecclesiastes, on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles—the most joyful of all the feasts, the book recommending the thankful enjoyment of the pleasures of life.

(5) Esther, at the Feast of Purim (a festival of late origin).

2. *The name of the book.*—In Hebrew it is called “The Song of Songs,” שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים; in the Vulgate, *Canticum Cantorum*; in the LXX, Ὕμνος ὕμνων. We often speak of it ourselves as “Canticles” or “Songs.” The title is expressive of its superior excellence. It implies that it is the most precious of songs. Compare the parallel expressions denoting superlativity: “Holy of Holies” (Exod. 26:33), “King of kings” (Ezek. 26:7), “God of gods” and “Lord of lords” (Deut. 10:17), “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5).

3. *Its theme and aim.*—Its subject is obviously love; primarily not the love of Christ for his church, nor yet the love of God for Israel, but rather ethical love, the love which triumphs over sensual love. This is enough, surely, to render it “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16, R. V.). The poem glorifies true love (cf. 8:6, 7).

4. *The story*.—A simple but beautiful Israelitish maiden, named Shulamith, from the little hamlet of Shulem, or Shunem, in the tribe of Issachar (Josh. 19:18) in Galilee, is captured, while dancing in a nut orchard, by Solomon, who, in passing by his vineyard in his chariot, was captivated by her beauty. She is taken to his palace and placed in his harem. Solomon thus plans to appropriate her to himself. But she is already betrothed to a shepherd near her home (possibly her half-brother). The king, assisted by the ladies of the court, do all they can to inflame the lust of this pure maiden, but she persistently refuses to accept of the king's proposals. Four times the king tries to persuade her to become one of his many queens (of whom he had sixty, besides eighty concubines, *cf.* 6:8), but her heart is steadfastly set on her shepherd lover who is ever present in her fancy. The flatteries of Solomon and of his harem prove in vain, and she is finally allowed to return to her country home and lover. The poem is most oriental.

5. *How best interpreted*.—In form the book is a poem, or idyl, with dramatic unity; not, however, "a series of independent songs," as Siegfried imagines, for no one section is complete in itself. The song is a dramatic poem, without a plot, but oriental and in keeping with Hebrew antiquity. It has been divided into six acts with twelve scenes (as Delitzsch); or five acts with thirteen scenes (as Ewald); or twelve scenes simply (as Curtiss); it is best interpreted by making Solomon, Shulamith, and her (absent) shepherd lover do the most of the speaking. This is the *literal* method of interpretation, which commends itself to most modern scholars, and does not exclude its deeper spiritual, or typical, signification, as advocated by Zöckler and Green.

6. *Analysis or scheme of the poem*.

ACT I (1:2—2:7).—THE LOVERS' MEETING.

SCENE I (1:2—8).—*Imprisoned in the king's harem, Shulamith longs for her absent lover.*

1:2-4*ab* Shulamith addressing her absent shepherd lover as though present.

1:4*cde* Ladies of the court singing in praise of Solomon who is feasting near by.

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1:5, 6 Shulamith to the ladies of the harem.

1:7 Shulamith to her absent lover.

1:8 Ladies ironically to Shulamith.

SCENE 2 (1:9—2:7).—*Solomon's first attempt to win Shulamith.*

1:9-11 Solomon compares her to his favorite mare.

1:12-14 Shulamith answers him sarcastically; dreams of her lover.

1:15 Solomon flatters her beauty.

1:16, 17 Shulamith, aside, applying his flatteries to her lover.

2:1 Shulamith trying to end her meeting with Solomon.

2:2 Solomon comparing her to the other members of his harem.

2:3, 4 Shulamith, aside, comparing her lover to other men.

2:5 Shulamith, overcome with thoughts of love for her absent lover,  
begs refreshment from the attendants by.

2:6 Shulamith expressing a wish about her lover.

2:7 Shulamith, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that love  
is spontaneous."

ACT II (2:8—3:5).—A MONOLOGUE AND A DREAM OF SHULAMITH.

SCENE 1 (2:8-17).—*Shulamith's reminiscence of her shepherd lover.*

2:8, 9 Recalls how he used to come to see her.

2:10-14 Imagines she hears him singing.

2:15 A snatch of an old familiar song.

2:16, 17 Professes her love for him, inviting him to come over the  
mountains of separation.

SCENE 2 (3:1-5).—*Shulamith's dream of her shepherd lover.*

3:1-4 Her first dream, in which she imagines she finds him.

3:5 She repeats her adjuration to the ladies that love cannot be  
forced.

ACT III (3:6—5:8).—HER ROYAL AND SHEPHERD LOVERS IN CONTRAST.

SCENE 1 (3:6-11).—*King Solomon returning in state from an afternoon's  
excursion.*

3:6 First lady calling attention of all to his royal approach.

3:7-10 Second lady describing the escort and the palanquin.

3:11 Eunuch bidding the ladies of the court go forth and meet the  
king.

SCENE 2 (4:1-7).—*Solomon's "proposal" to Shulamith; his second visit.*

SCENE 3 (4:8—5:1).—*An ideal interview between Shulamith and her  
shepherd lover.*

4:8-15 The lover's impassioned invitation to Shulamith.

4:16 Her own gracious welcome of him.

5:1abcd His acceptance of her offer.

5:1ef His address to the wedding guests.

SCENE 4 (5:2-8).—*Shulamith relates her second dream to the ladies.*

- 5:2*ab* Shulamith dreams that her lover knocks at her door.
- 5:2*cde* Her lover speaks, in imagination.
- 5:3 Shulamith's reply before rising to let him in.
- 5:4-7 Shulamith's vain search for him through the city.
- 5:8 Her repeated adjuration to the ladies.

ACT IV (5:9—8:4).—LOVE'S LABOR LOST.

SCENE 1 (5:9—6:3).—*Contest between Shulamith and the ladies over their beloved ones.*

- 5:9 The ladies of the court surprised at Shulamith's rejection of Solomon.
- 5:10-16 Shulamith eloquently describes her absent lover.
- 6:1 Ladies inquiring more earnestly after him.
- 6:2, 3 Shulamith's answer to their inquiry.

SCENE 2 (6:4-13).—*Solomon's third attempt to win Shulamith.*

- 6:4-9 Solomon attempting to win her through flattery.
- 6:10 Solomon quoting what the ladies had said when they first saw her in the nut orchard.
- 6:11, 12 Shulamith excusing herself for being alone when captured.
- 6:13*ab* Solomon quoting what the ladies then requested of her.
- 6:13*c* Solomon quoting what she replied.
- 6:13*d* Solomon quoting what the ladies further requested.

SCENE 3 (7:1-5).—*Shulamith having yielded to their solicitations to dance, the ladies of the harem compliment her beauty and grace of person.*

SCENE 4 (7:6—8:4).—*Solomon's final endeavor to woo Shulamith.*

- 7:6-9*a* Solomon addressing her in lustful language.
- 7:9*b*, 10 Shulamith, interrupting, turns the conversation to her shepherd lover, declaring emphatically that she is *his*, not Solomon's.
- 7:11—8:3 Shulamith, speaking to her lover as if present, repulses the king.
- 8:4 Shulamith closing the scene, with the adjuration to the ladies of the court that love is spontaneous and cannot be forced.

ACT V (8:5-14).—ALLOWED TO RETURN TO HER LOVER.

SCENE 1 (8:5-7).—*Shulamith with her shepherd lover on the way to Shulem.*

- 8:5*ab* Villagers inquire, "Who comes?"
- 8:5*cde* Shulamith pointing to the "apple tree" where they had once sat together.
- 8:6, 7 Shulamith with deep emotion declaring the irresistible might of true love.

SCENE 2 (8:8-14).—*With her brothers at home.*

- 8:8, 9 Shulamith recalling her brothers' words when she was a little girl.
- 8:10 Shulamith's proud boast that she had maintained her virginity, and how Solomon respected her for it, sending her away in peace.
- 8:11, 12 Shulamith relates how Solomon offered her the vineyard in which he had captured her.
- 8:13 Her shepherd lover, at last, speaks with his own voice requesting a song.
- 8:14 Shulamith begins to sing, requesting him to flee away, but not too far!

7. *The key of the book is to be found in 8:6, 7, "Love is strong as death."*

#### 8. *Literature.*

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